(a) whether the Government are aware of the serious problem being faced by public due to the mutilated, dirty and torn currency notes;

(b) whether the Government are also aware that the counters opened by the Reserve Bank of India for exchage of mutilated notes are not sufficient to cater the demand of the public; and

(c) if so, the steps Government proposed to take to ramedy the situation ?

THE MINISTER OF STATE IN THE MINISTRY OF FINANCE (SHRI M.P. VEERENDRA KUMAR) : (a) Due to capacity constraints, the note printing presses in the country are not able to fully meet the aver-increasing requirement of fresh notes by Reserve Bank of India (RBI). The gap is met by recycling the notes in circulation and as a result, the quality of notes has deteriorated.

(b) and (c) Counters have been made available at 17 issue offices of RBI which provide facilities to the members of public for exchanging mutilated, torn and soiled notes. In addition, the public sector banks maintaining currency chests have been delegated with full powers to provide such exchange facilities. Similarly, all branches of public sector banks have also been authorised by RBI to exchange soiled and slightly mutilated notes. In order to reduce shortage of currency notes the following steps have also been initiated by the Government;

1. Modernisation of the two note printing presses at Nasik and Dewas.

2. Setting up of two more note-printing presses, one at Salboni (West Bengal) and the other at Mysore (Karnataka) under the control of Reserve Bank of India.

3. Comisation of lower denomination notes of Rupee 1, Rs. 2 and Rs. 5 and diversion of the capacity so released for printing notes of higher denominations.

4. Import of 3,600 million pieces of printed notes from abroad, as a one time measure.

Coal Potentials in Maharashtra

4375. SHRI ANANT GUDHE : Will the Minister of COAL be pleased to state :

(a) the number of ongoing coal projects in Maharashtra alongwith their estimated cost;

(b) the number of major projects of Western Coal Fields Limited pending for clearance with Union Government;

(c) the action plan formulated for development of coal industry in Maharashtra during 1997-98 and Ninth Five Year Plan;

(d) whether the Government have formulated a plan to set up a coal washeries at Sasti; and

(e) if so, the details thereof and present status of the proposal ?

THE MINISTER OF STATE OF THE MINISTRY OF COAL (SHRIMATI KANTI SINGH) : (a) As on 1.3.1997, nine coal mining projects each costing Rs. 20 crs. and above at an estimated cost of Rs. 496.31 crs. are under implementation in the State of Maharashtra under Western Coalfields Limited (WCL).

(b) At present, Urdhan Opencast Project located in the State of Madhya Pradesh under WCL is under appraisal at the Govt. level for approval.

(c) As per the Action Plan formulated for development of coal industry in Maharashtra under WCL during the Ninth Five Year Plan, a production capacity of 26.34 million tonnes per annum has been planned by the terminal year of the Ninth Plan at an investment of about Rs. 1576.07 crs. The investment proposed during 1997-98 is Rs. 294.44 crs.

(d) and (e) There is a proposal to set up a coal washery for beneficiation of 1.5 mty of raw coal throughput at Sasti mine site under 'Build-own-operate' (BOO) scheme. Negotiations with the party setting up the washery and the prospective consumers for the washed coal the under progress for finalisation.

Free port in A.P.

4376. SHRIMATI LAKSHMI PANABAKA : Will the Minister of COMMERCE be pleased to state :

(a) whether the Government have received any proposal from Government of Andhra Pradesh to declare the Krishnapatnam Port as 'Free Port'; and

(b) if so, the action taken by the Government in this regard ?

THE MINISTER OF STATE OF THE MINISTRY OF COMMERCE (SHRI BOLLA BULLI RAMAIAH) : (a) and (b) A suggestion has been received from the Govt. of Andhra Pradesh to declare Krishnapatnam Port as 'Free Port' However, an advisory Committee set up by the Govt. to examine the desirability and feasibility of establishing a Free Port in India has recommended Goa as a suitable location for setting up of a Free Port. Tuticorin has been suggested as a suitable site for a second Free Port on the east coast.